

Authors and Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Background

The Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) is an urban school system that serves over 98,000 students. Like many urban school systems across the country, this system, once recognized for educational excellence, has been struggling. For over 20 years, BCPSS has been a system in decline, without a sufficient supply of high-quality teachers, without adequately supplied and maintained school buildings, and without resources to make a change. Recognizing the failure of the system to adequately meet the needs of Baltimore's public school students, an aggressive effort at reform was initiated in 1997. This effort was designed to change the system dramatically, reforming and revitalizing everything from its curriculum, to its management, to its maintenance and business functions.

Maryland State Senate Bill (SB) 795—the City-State Partnership legislation—established and provided detailed guidance for this reform. In addition to laying out an explicit set of changes that needed to be addressed, SB 795 dissolved the existing management structure and removed the school system from control by the Office of the Mayor. A new relationship between the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the school system was established. In addition, the legislation specified steps that a New Board of School Commissioners was expected to take, and provided a detailed listing of the changes that were to result from them.

Some highlights of the legislation are as follows:

- The establishment of a nine-member New Board of School Commissioners, jointly appointed by the mayor and the governor, with assistance from MSDE. This Board was to include a specified number of experts in business, education, and working

with disabled children. A student member (nonvoting) was also included.

- The development of a transition plan and a Master Plan to provide direction and oversight for the educational system. This Master Plan was to provide for the improvement of student achievement and the management and accountability of BCPSS.
- The establishment of a Chief Executive Officer, a Chief Academic Officer, a Chief Operating Officer, a Research and Evaluation unit, and a Parent and Community Advisory Board.
- In addition, starting with the transition year following the passage of SB 795, the state has provided BCPSS with \$254 million in additional funding to support reform.

Recognizing that change does not happen over night, the legislation called for a multiyear effort. Included was a set of reporting requirements for the Board, for the school system's Chief Executive Officer, and for MSDE. In addition, SB 795 also required two external assessments of progress, 1) an interim assessment, and 2) a final evaluation.

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the second of these external assessments, the “final” evaluation. The evaluation provides a broad-based analysis of BCPSS' achievements and examines the degree to which, under the City-State Partnership, BCPSS is moving toward providing a more effective and efficient educational system. It examines issues concerning system management, system structure, and student outcomes to determine whether or not the underlying problems are being addressed and the extent to which current strategies are moving BCPSS toward success.

Approach

The evaluation of the City-State Partnership calls for examination of both detailed operational questions concerning changes in instructional and support services and broad-based research questions about the efficacy of the overall reform. To address these areas, a multilevel, mixed-method evaluation design was developed.

Exhibit E-1 lays out the conceptual framework underlying this design. It consists of three components: resources and inputs, areas of investigation, and research questions.

Mixed-method methodology was adopted to address these questions. Mixed-method approaches combine quantitative data collection approaches, such as surveys and analyses of test performance, with qualitative data collection approaches, such as interviews, site visits, focus groups, and document reviews. The former provide numerical estimates of outcomes that can be used to assess progress against standards or targets; the latter provide rich, narrative information that can be used to examine phenomena not readily amenable to quantitative exploration to provide a context and fuller explanation of the quantitative data. Multiple sources of data were used to address each of the focal areas of investigation and the study questions under them. The study used:

- Analyses of extant data, such as test scores;
- Review of documents such as plans, memos, and reports;
- Surveys of representative populations of parents, teachers, and principals;
- Site visits to a sample of schools;
- Executive interviews with key stakeholders within and outside of BCPSS; and
- Focus groups with teachers, principals, and community members.

Assessments of progress were made taking into account standards provided by:

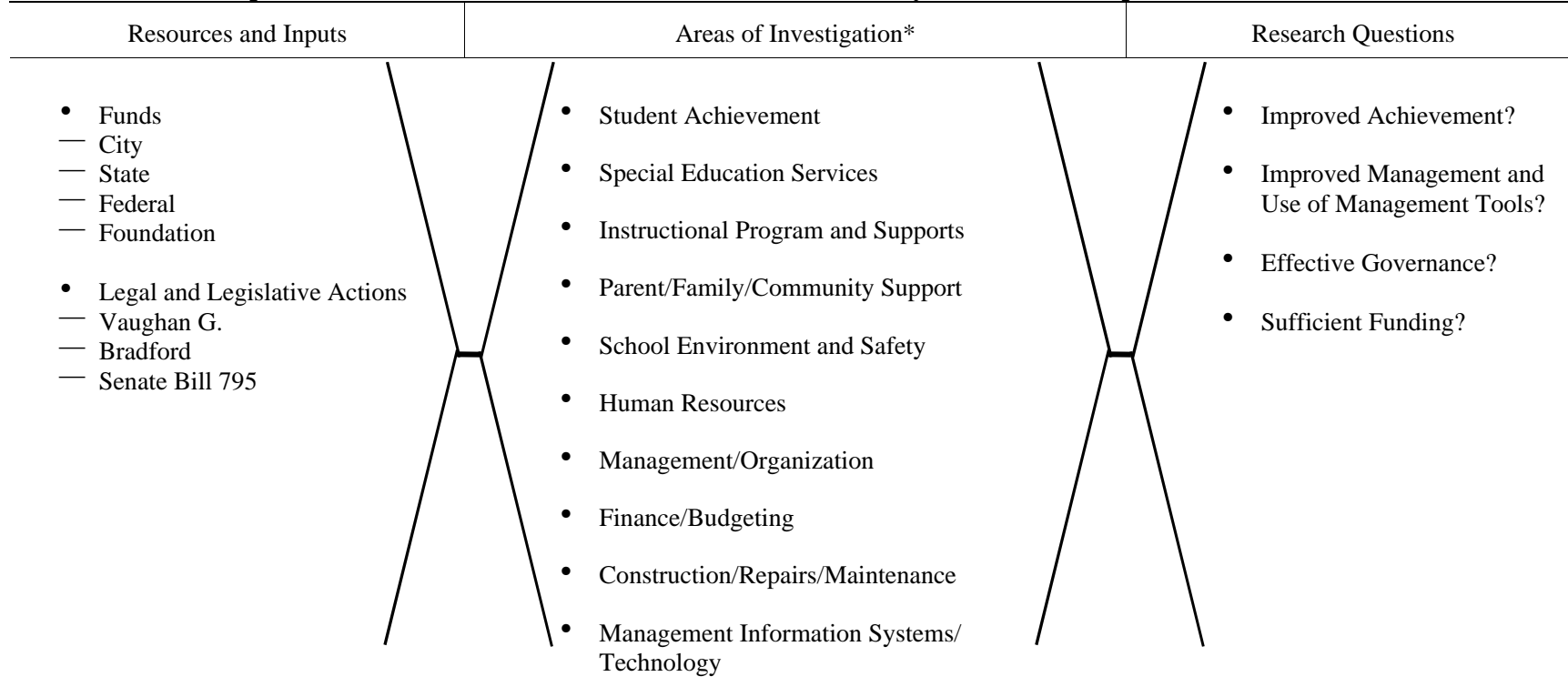
- Maryland State Standards for Student Achievement;
- BCPSS' own targets for student performances;
- Practices in other Maryland districts and similar urban systems across the country;
- Guidelines for best practice; and
- The research and evaluation literature.

Overall Findings

The findings of our analyses show that the New Board of School Commissioners, in partnership with MSDE, has responded in good faith to the requirements of SB 795 and provided strong leadership in improving what, by all criteria, was an educational system beyond the brink of failure. With the support of MSDE, the New Board of School Commissioners has responded to every one of the requirements specified by the legislation and begun to establish a coherent administrative and management structure, based on a set of clearly articulated goals and objectives. The Master Plan has evolved into a framework that ties together what were previously disconnected, isolated, and, too often, dysfunctional units.

In 2001, the City-State Partnership is still intact and being guided by the spirit and the specifications of SB 795. Many new initiatives have been put in place, although few could be considered fully tested or established. The Master Plan continues to be revised on an annual basis, and a compliance monitoring system has been installed to examine the extent to which the needs of students with disabilities are being met.

While there has been considerable turnover at the management level of BCPSS, many of the leaders from the state and school community are still

Exhibit E-1.**Overview of the conceptual framework for the final evaluation of the BCPSS City-State Partnership**

*These areas reflect the objectives of The Master Plan.

active players in the reform and maintain a strong commitment to its goals. It is important to point out that belief in the ability of the system to change, at least among the players in the Partnership, not only persists, but has grown.

The extra funds provided through the City-State Partnership and Remedy Plans have been used appropriately to address areas of need. And where funds have been directed, such as programs for elementary school students, signs of improvement are emerging.

Compared to the situation that existed in the mid-1990s, BCPSS is tremendously improved. Compared to both external and self-established standards for educational excellence, BCPSS has a long way to go. Exhibit E-2 presents an overview of major system accomplishments since the enactment of SB 795.

It is by no means certain that the system will achieve the turnaround that all hope for. And, achieving this turnaround will require the support of those both within and outside of BCPSS itself. However, as this report will show, there are many hopeful signs that the efforts invested in the City-State Partnership have had a positive payback, and some concrete evidence that better teaching and learning are taking place.

Implications for Research Questions

The evaluation of the City-State Partnership was designed to answer four broad research questions. Presented below are the questions and answers from our study.

Question 1. Whether or not BCPSS has improved student achievement during the four years since SB 795 was enacted.

Student Achievement. Our evaluation shows that there has been improvement in student achievement in the 4 years since SB 795 was enacted. While a substantial gap exists between BCPSS and the state overall on both the MSPAP and CTBS/5, and selectively on the MFT, BCPSS has accelerated its rate of progress at the elementary grades where the vast majority of

resources have been targeted (Figures E-1 through E-3). This is illustrated most strongly on the local testing program in which the CTBS/5 is administered in grades 1–7 (Figure E-4). In a number of cases, the rate of progress in BCPSS has exceeded that of the state overall on the MSPAP (Figure E-5). At the same time, the evaluation shows that there is considerable work left to do, and that the pace of learning must be increased if the system is to reach Maryland state goals and the 2004 targets for student achievement that BCPSS has set for itself.

Question 2. Whether or not BCPSS has improved system management since SB 795 was enacted, as evidenced by performance in previously identified areas of deficiency. And, whether or not BCPSS' current management tools are being used effectively as evidenced by the implementation of key Master Plan initiatives.

Management. There have been notable improvements in the management of the system, with an aim toward better supporting the BCPSS instructional mission. The roles of the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Academic Officer, and Chief Operating Officer have been defined and filled by competent, well-qualified staff. Although not complete, improvements have been noted in the financial reporting system, in procurement, in information technology services, and in management of surplus facilities. While staff turnover has been a major problem and change has been slow and uneven, there are at present a cadre of very capable leaders in key positions. Over the years, increasingly effective use has been made of The Master Plan as a tool for guiding, integrating, and prioritizing efforts within and across the instructional and operational support systems.

A major problem has persisted in the ability of the system to monitor itself and to assess progress against progress standards. Compared to BCPSS' needs, as well as other urban systems across the nation, the Division of Research, Education, and Accountability (READ) has failed to provide adequate information. By default, much of the monitoring, outside of test scores, has addressed activities completed as opposed to outcomes. The new targets identified in The Master Plan and

Exhibit E-2.**Major system accomplishments since the enactment of SB 795 through 2000–2001****Student Achievement**

- Increased student achievement, especially at the elementary grades
- Adopted citywide curricula and purchase of textbooks K–12

K–8

- Language arts/reading
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social studies

High school

- English I–IV, algebra, biology, and American government
- Science
- U.S. history, and world history
- Established and expanded whole-school reform models
 - Achievement First
 - Direct Instruction
 - Success for All
 - New Schools Initiative
- Carried out class-size reduction in grades 1 to 5
- Established 111 Pre-K and 73 all-day kindergarten programs
- Assigned reading teachers to each middle school and implemented Soar to Success
- Developed a Blueprint for Baltimore’s Neighborhood High Schools
- Began preparation for high school assessments
- Targeted assistance to schools that are reconstitution eligible

Student Management

- Opened two Alternative Learning Centers and expanded programs for disruptive and at-risk students
- Adopted a new code of conduct and student discipline policy
- Developed a student promotion and retention policy
- Expanded before-school, after-school, and summer-school programs for students at-risk

Human Resources

- Increased incentive for new teacher hires and increased teacher salaries. The starting teacher salary raised to third highest in the state

- Reduced time it takes for teachers to reach maximum salary level from 27 years to 20 years
- Established a Performance-Based Teacher Evaluation System
- Increased teacher support
 - Professional development for new curricula
 - Mentoring programs
 - Instructional support for teachers in reading and mathematics

Governance

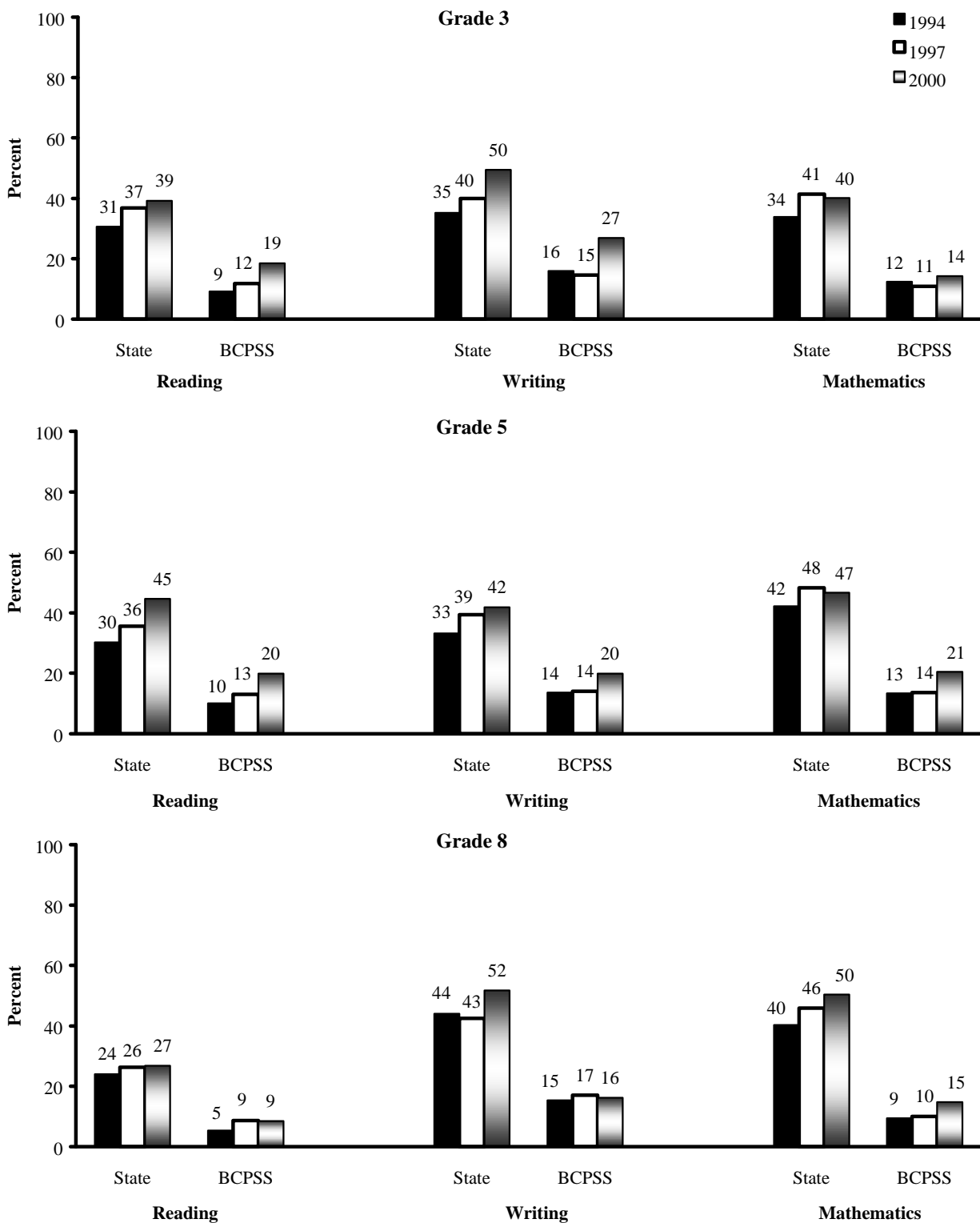
- Developed Master Plan and Master Plan Updates around a consistent system of goals and objectives
- Hired experienced and professionally recognized leaders for the positions of Chief Executive Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Technology Officer, and Chief Officer of READ
- Established the position of Chief Financial Officer
- Formed Chief Executive Officer’s District for lowest performing schools

Infrastructure Support

- Made Student and Staff Information System (SASI) operational; Upgraded Special Education Tracking System (SETS)
- Expanded number of schools with wired classrooms and provision of email access to principals
- Developed a Facilities Plan, including school closings, consolidations, and construction activities
- Managed the school-closure process with extraordinary sensitivity, openness, and patience.
- Improved timeliness and accuracy of financial reporting
- Increased compliance with special education requirements
- Reorganized the area offices to better serve instructional needs
- Assumed all responsibilities for procurement, making the process faster, more transparent, and more accurate
- Assumed all responsibilities for food services after a contractor pulled out, kept the operations within budget, and successfully managed the closure of the old and opening of the new main warehouse facility.

Figure E-1.

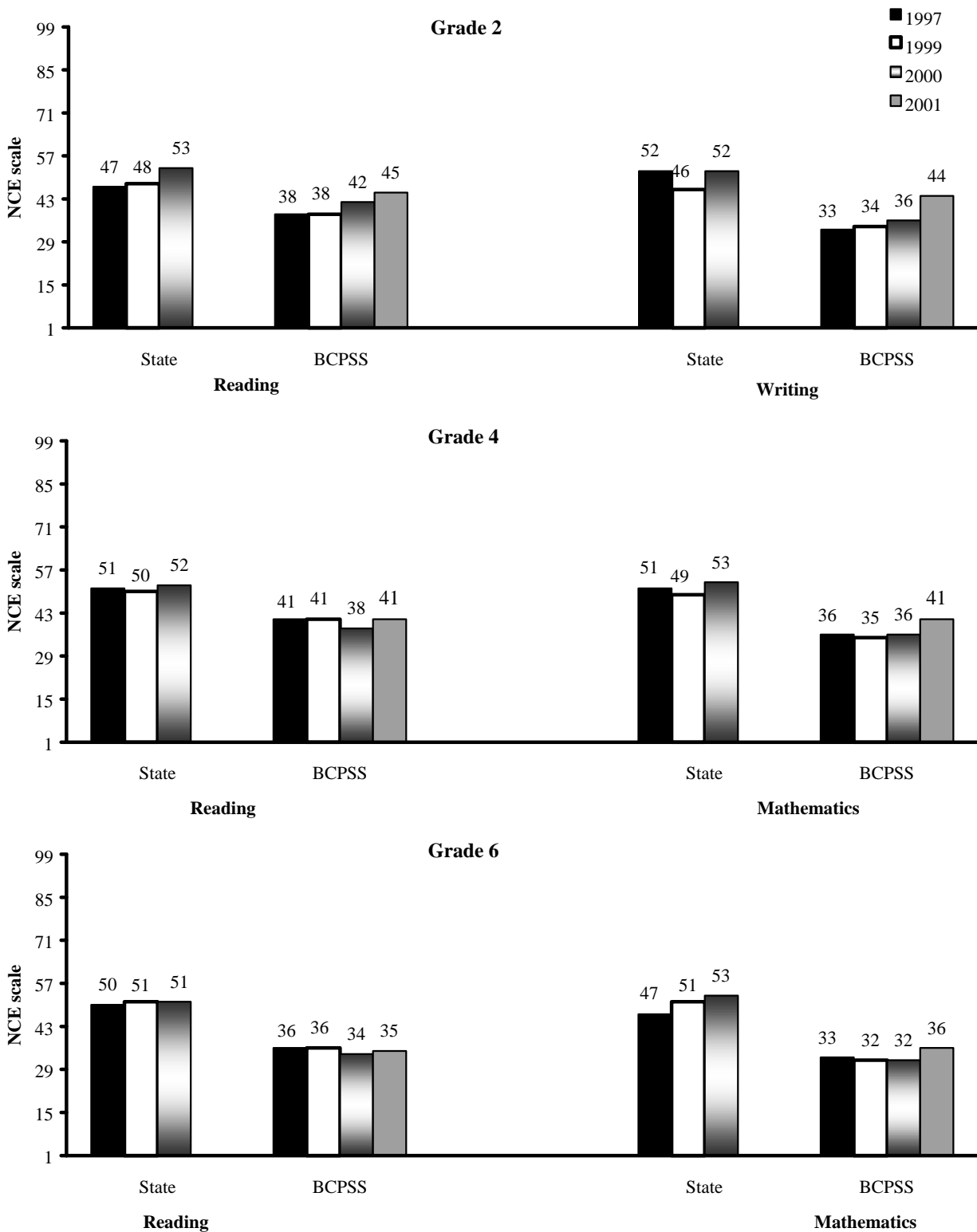
Percentage of BCPSS students and students statewide attaining satisfactory performance on the MSPAP, by grade and subject: 1994, 1997, and 2000



SOURCE: Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland School Performance Report 2000. Available: <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us>

Figure E-2.

Normal curve equivalents on the CTBS/5 statewide and in BCPSS: Selected years, 1997–2001

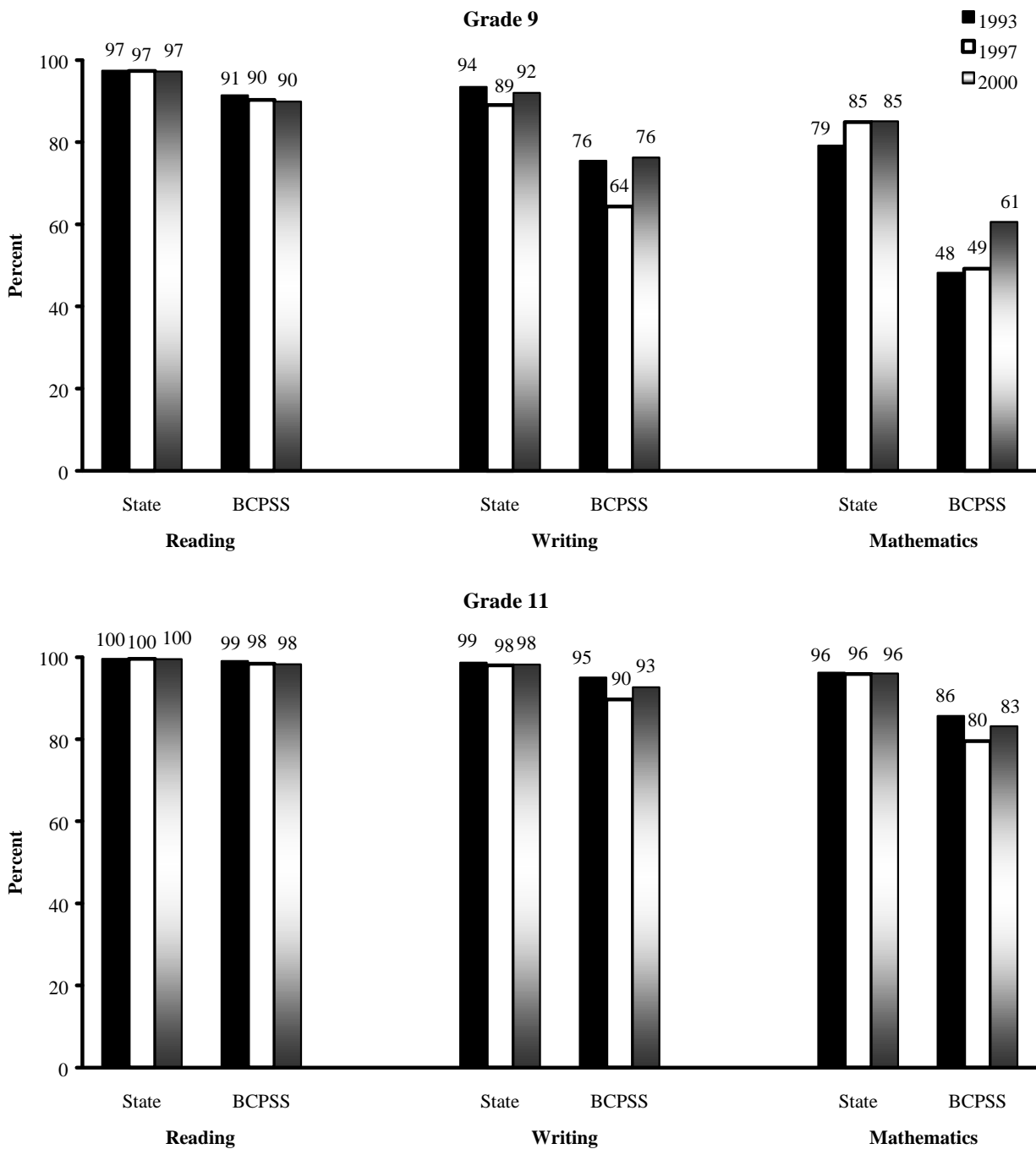


NOTE: 2001 data not available from MSDE. Normal curve equivalents computed by Westat.

SOURCE: Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland School Performance Report 2000. Available: <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us>

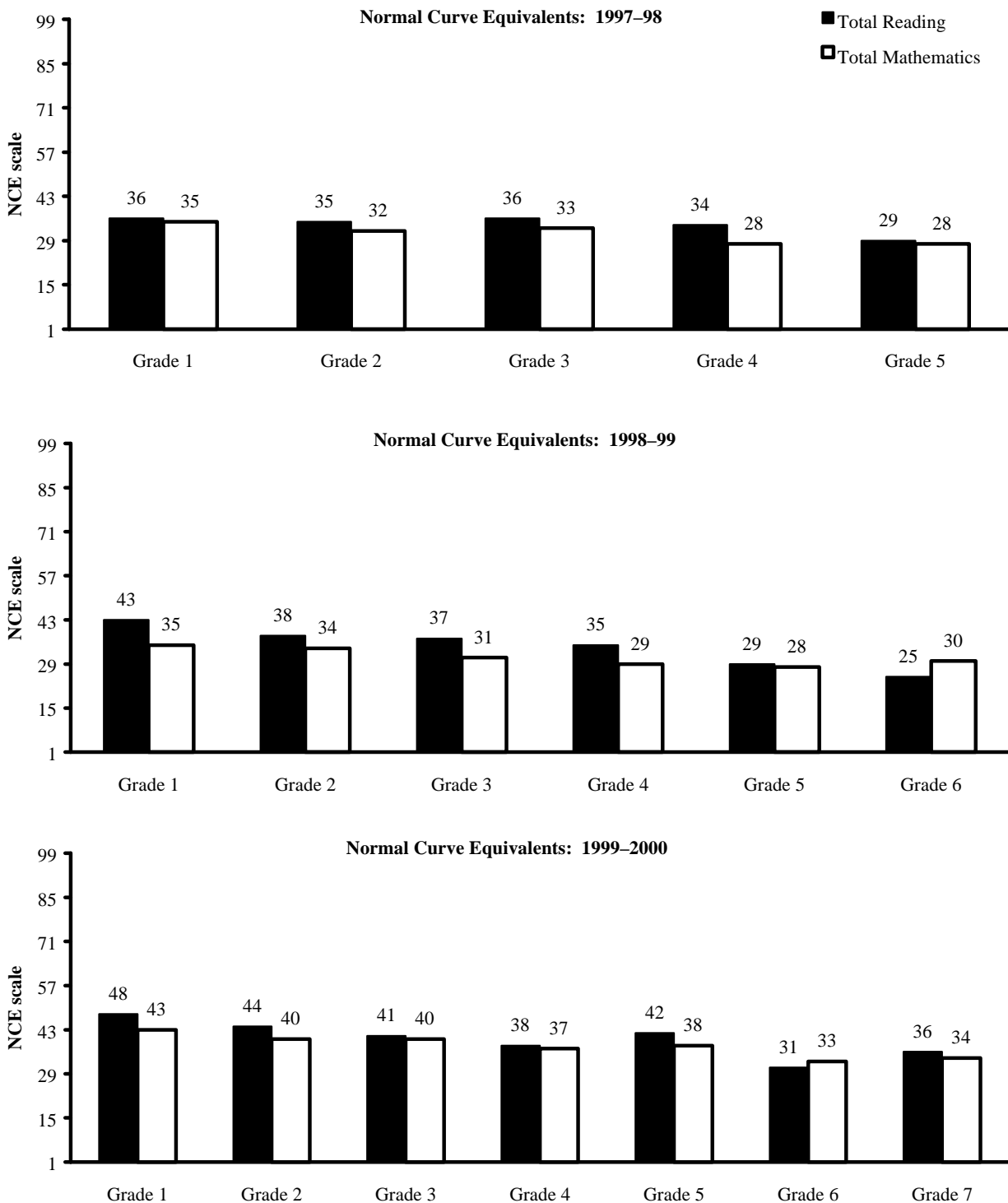
Figure E-3.

MFT pass rates for the state and BCPSS, by grade and subject: 1993, 1997, and 2000



SOURCE: Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland School Performance Report 2000. Available: <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us>

Figure E-4.
CTBS/5 tests results for Baltimore City public schools, by grade

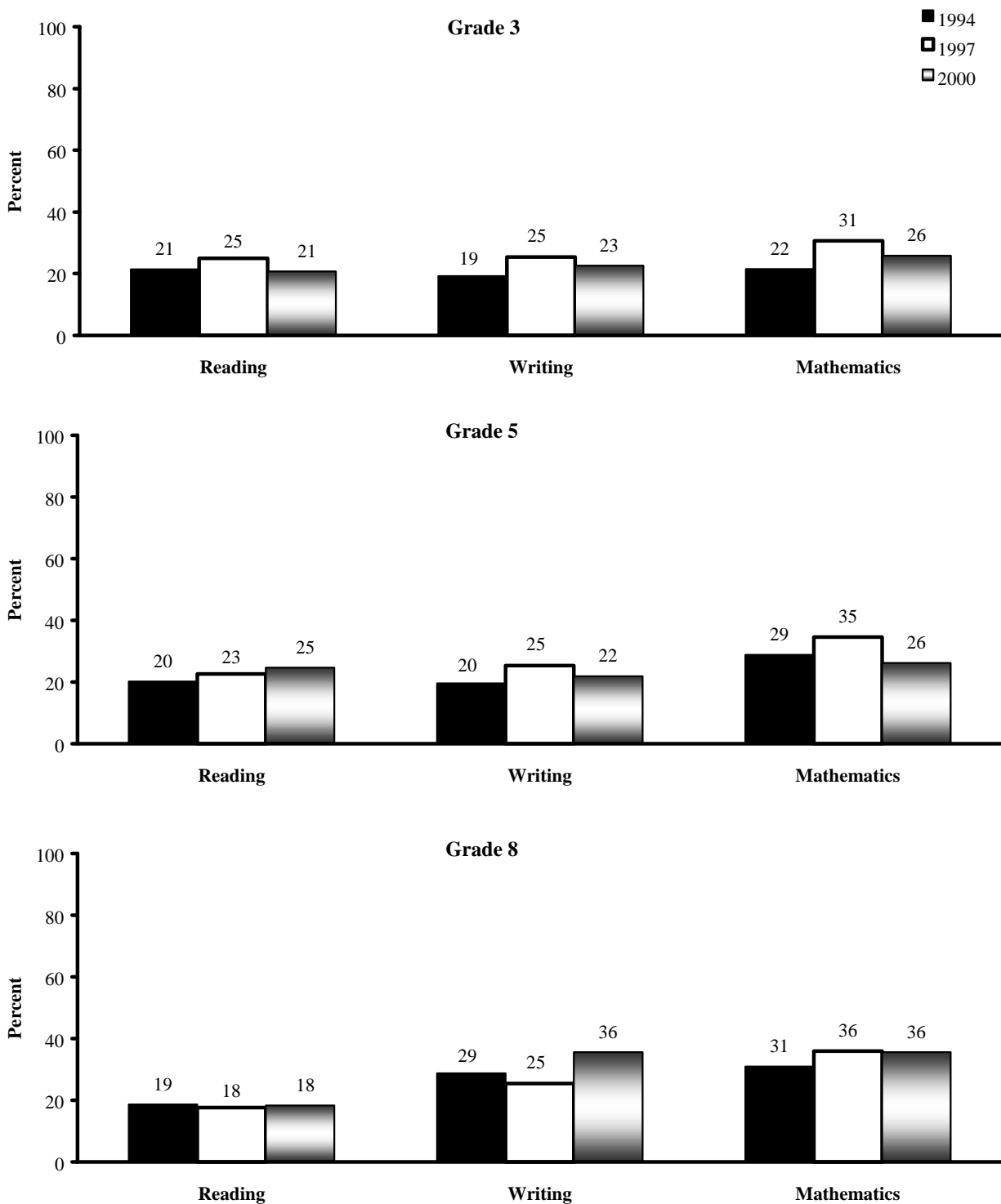


NOTE: These scores different from the ones in Figure E-2 because the state data for grades 2, 4, and 6 prior to 2001 were based on a sample of students. Normal curve equivalents computed by Westat.

SOURCE: Baltimore City Public Schools.

Figure E-5.

Differences in percentage of BCPSS students and students statewide attaining satisfactory performance on the MSPAP, by grade and subject: 1994, 1997, and 2000



NOTE: Differences computed by Westat.

SOURCE: Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland School Performance Report 2000. Available: <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us>

the emerging plans for evaluation by READ provide indications that this problem is beginning to be addressed.

Question 3. Whether and the extent to which any such improvement or lack thereof is the result of the new governance structures established by SB 795.

Governance. The establishment of the New Board of School Commissioners and the City-State Partnership were bold and innovative components of SB 795. Judging by what we have seen, they were well reasoned, and we find no basis on which to argue that BCPSS should return to its previous status of being controlled by the City of Baltimore. The Board has played a major role in the progress that has been seen to date. Indeed, given the turnover in staff in key leadership positions, the Board has filled a number of roles not typically adopted by a policy making body. While there have been missteps, the end result is that change has occurred, and it is the kind of change that was sorely needed.

The state has been supportive in many ways. Additional funding from Annapolis has been critical. In addition, it is hard to imagine that BCPSS would have gained the ground that it has without the working partnership between MSDE and the school system.

Question 4. Whether the levels and use of funds for the Baltimore City Public School System are sufficient.

Adequacy of Funds. The issue of funding adequacy is one that has been in the forefront of discussion about education and educational change in BCPSS. While the City-State Partnership has resulted in additional funds being allocated to BCPSS, the need for continued support remains. Based on analyses of what is needed at the school level for a quality education conducted by two groups of financial experts, it appears that a funding shortfall does exist. If one accepts the conclusions of these groups and examines the current status of staffing in BCPSS, more funding is definitely needed to bring school staffing up to quality standards.

* * *

Looking across the findings, one other general issue is important to raise in evaluating the success of the City-State Partnership: the participation of teachers in the reform process. We found the depth of teacher disenfranchisement to be very disturbing. Teachers do not feel that they are being consulted on issues near and dear to them, nor do they feel that some of their urgent needs for support are being met. We are not in a position to assess whether these feelings are based on fact or on some misperception. We do know, however, that the feelings of alienation are profound and cannot help but interfere with the reform process.

Additional Findings

In the remainder of this summary, we highlight findings from each of the areas examined and provide some overarching recommendations.

Achievement

Evaluation findings indicate that BCPSS has made progress toward achievement goals but still has considerable room for improvement. Specifically,

- Achievement on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) and the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills/5 (CTBS/5) in BCPSS has improved steadily in the years following implementation of The Master Plan. While performance on the Maryland Functional Tests (MFT) has also improved, initial BCPSS analyses suggest that there may be a decline in these scores in 2001. Achievement remains considerably lower than state averages on the CTBS/5 and the MSPAP. On the MSPAP, student achievement falls far short of state standards in all subjects and all grades examined in the evaluation.
- BCPSS has set some challenging, but appropriate targets for growth by 2004. Projections of future performance based on

current rates of growth indicate that the system must accelerate its rate of progress to meet the targets it has set for itself for achievement by 2004. If these targets are met and the increased rate of learning continues, BCPSS could meet state standards between 2012 and 2018.

- Special education students show evidence of better performance over years.
- The impact of whole-school reform models is varied. Students in Achievement First (AF) schools demonstrated significantly higher gains on the MSPAP than those in matched comparison schools. Students in Direct Instruction (DI) schools performed no differently than those in the comparison schools. While both sets of schools will have to struggle to meet BCPSS' targets for success set for 2004, the challenge will be greater for the DI than the AF schools.
- Reconstitution-eligible (RE)* schools have accelerated their rate of growth and are showing progress. Analyses at the school level indicate that these schools have grown in achievement at a faster rate than non-RE schools since the passage of SB 795.
- Attendance has increased modestly, but dropout rates are unchanged since introduction of The Master Plan. The number of students graduating with high school diplomas also has increased during this period. These findings are true for students in both regular and special education programs.

*The term "reconstitution-eligible" has been changed to "local reconstitution." We use RE throughout this report because that was the term used when our evaluation was initiated.

Instructional Programs

The evaluation examined:

- The citywide curriculum framework,
- The promotion and retention policy,
- Whole-school reform models,
- Other intervention programs,
- Supports for reconstitution-eligible schools,
- Special education services,
- Parental involvement, and
- The maintenance of a secure, civil, and orderly environment.

Citywide Curriculum Framework

We found that BCPSS has taken major steps in establishing citywide curricula aligned to the Maryland State Standards and Learning Outcomes. We found a strong relationship between the Maryland Content Standards and Learning Outcomes and the BCPSS Content Standards for English/language arts for grades K-12 and mathematics for K-8. The process used for selecting the textbooks was reasonable and included the involvement of critical stakeholder groups.

The system has worked to supply teachers with the supports, materials, and resources needed to implement the curricula. Although some teachers feel that they do not have a sufficient number of textbooks and some are concerned about the alignment of the textbooks with the milestone tests and curricula, even those who see gaps feel the situation is improved.

A program of professional development has been put in place to assist teachers in learning to use the new curricular tools. While the majority of teachers (71 percent) report having received training, those who may need it the most, i.e., new teachers and teachers who are provisionally certified, have had significantly less training.

The milestones tests developed to monitor progress over the years appear problematic at present. Both what they measure and how they are used needs closer examination.

Finally, although BCPSS has been moving toward greater inclusion of students with disabilities, it appears that more support is needed to assist classroom teachers in using the citywide curricula with students with special needs.

Student Promotion and Retention Policy

BCPSS has begun to take steps to identify students who are not achieving the district's academic standards and to respond to their needs. New testing protocols are in place to assess students' performance throughout the school year and at key transition points during their academic careers. The district has instituted special interventions to help at-risk students achieve the academic standards, including programs conducted during the regular school day, before and after school, on weekends, and during the summer.

Findings from the school visits and surveys indicate that principals, teachers, and parents supported the objectives of the initial policy of ending social promotion, but they did not feel that the policy—as it was understood and implemented—was achieving the goals to any great extent. There is no consensus regarding the effect that the policy has had on student performance or on the level of parental concern over students' performance. In addition, there is widespread confusion about the criteria for promotion and frustration with the lack of alignment between the BCPSS milestones and the statewide assessments.

Effectiveness of Whole-School Reform Models

SB 795 required BCPSS to develop model school reform initiatives. While a number of models are being used in BCPSS, Westat was asked to focus the evaluation on two of them, Direct Instruction

and Achievement First. The New Schools Initiative (NSI) was evaluated to a much lesser extent.

Our analyses indicate that these whole-school reform models have been beneficial, but that it is time to take a hard look at the extent to which the current models are meeting BCPSS' needs and are reflective of what is known about best practices in instruction.

Site visit data show that staff were generally quite positive about AF. They thought that the program helped to give them a more focused and consistent approach to literacy. Staff spoke highly of the supports they were receiving. The fact that AF can be used with the new BCPSS curriculum was also seen as a plus. The one area of concern regarding AF was that with so much attention placed on reading/language arts, other subjects, especially mathematics, did not receive sufficient attention.

DI received a more mixed review during the site visits. Criticisms centered on the highly scripted curriculum rather than on the administration of the programs and its supports, which appear to be done well. Staff recognized the positive effect that DI has had on students' reading levels, particularly at the lower grades; some question its utility at the higher grade levels. Staff expressed concern for students who leave a DI school to attend middle school or transfer to another elementary school. They did not feel that these students were prepared for traditional instruction. Some parents felt they were unable to help their children with homework using the DI method, despite the fact that workshops were provided to help parents learn how to use the method. Teachers were also critical of Core Knowledge, used for social studies and science in DI schools, saying that it is too dense and does not allow the students to establish the proper foundations before exposing them to complex concepts. Another difficulty cited with Core Knowledge was the lack of instructional materials.

Other Intervention Programs

The evaluation looked at special programs to provide early learning, reduction in class-size initiatives, and reforms at the middle and high school levels. These were examined in considerably less depth than the instructional initiatives already discussed.

Ready-to-Learn Initiatives. During the past 4 years, BCPSS has made concerted efforts to help prepare children for 1st grade and beyond. Driven by The Master Plan, the district has instituted and expanded prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, assessed children's progress, and provided professional development and materials to classroom teachers. BCPSS has increased the number of full-day kindergarten programs from 38 (before The Master Plan was adopted) to over 70 in the 2000–2001 school year. During their 4-year relationship with BCPSS, the Children's Learning Initiative (CLI) has provided professional development, instructional materials, and other forms of support for preschool programs in 80 percent of the elementary schools and 65 percent of the elementary/middle schools in the district.

Classroom observations indicate widespread use of various elements of the CLI program. For example, "word walls," well-stocked classroom libraries, and literacy activities were all evident during site visits conducted by the Westat team. However, attempts to implement CLI practices to increase parental participation in child literacy efforts have not met with great success. Based on preliminary results, it appears that implementation of CLI programs has improved children's achievement. This indicates that further expansion of the districts' prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, and the continuation of its contract with CLI, are appropriate.

Class-Size Reduction. During the late 1990s, a growing number of national studies indicated the benefits of small class sizes (fewer than 20 students), particularly at the early elementary grades (K–3). In that context, The Master Plan called for reductions in class sizes. Currently, teacher positions are allocated to schools on a formula basis—1:22 for the lower elementary

grades and 1:24 for the upper elementary grades—although there may be some exceptions.

The Westat team was provided only limited data from BCPSS regarding class size, and it was impossible to evaluate the extent to which class size has been reduced or to determine the current size of classes at the various grade levels. Our survey data suggest that the average class size across all elementary grades is approaching the level (below 20 students) that research suggests is needed for making a difference in student achievement. Further reductions in *some* classes have also been accomplished. For example, among schools participating in the Achievement First program, class size is often smaller during the literacy block, when teachers of music, art, physical education, and library work with reading groups.

It should be noted that recent guidance from the federal Class Size Reduction Program includes kindergarten; however, reduction in kindergarten class size is not defined as an objective in the 2001–20002 Master Plan Update.

Middle School and High School Efforts. During the past 3 years, BCPSS has focused most school reform efforts on the elementary level as they felt they would have the biggest impact there. However, some actions were taken to address middle and high school reform: curriculum development and textbook purchasing were done for both the middle and high schools; two new central office positions, director of middle school improvement and director of high school improvement, were created; and separate task forces were established for middle schools and high schools to recommend reforms.

Most of the reforms for the middle grades had not been implemented at the time of the evaluation. One exception was the placement of at least one reading teacher in each reconstitution-eligible middle school. High school reform efforts have focused especially on the zoned high schools. Initiatives implemented thus far consist of 9th grade interventions and strategies to aid the transition from middle school to high school. Initial steps have been taken toward establishing

academies, but a great deal has yet to be done to build smaller learning communities.

Because reform activities for middle and high school grades have received far less attention than have those for elementary schools, it is not surprising that principals at the secondary school levels expressed significantly fewer positive opinions than elementary principals about the reform activities and the availability of resources. BCPSS is taking steps to address the concerns; the BCPSS Remedy Plan for FY 2003 contains extensive proposals for middle and high school reforms. As this report was going to print, BCPSS released a Blueprint for Baltimore's Neighborhood High Schools.

Supports for Reconstitution-Eligible (RE) Schools

SB 795 required BCPSS to identify actions needed to improve the status of schools that are subject to a state reconstitution notice. As of January 2000, 80 BCPSS schools were reconstitution eligible (RE) and an additional 3 schools had been placed under state reconstitution. In January 2001, one of the RE schools was placed under state reconstitution and an additional seven schools were placed on RE status. At the same time, Pimlico Elementary School was officially removed from the state's list of local reconstitution schools. This removal was a major milestone as no school declared RE in BCPSS had previously been removed from the list.

The criteria for identifying schools as RE are scores on state tests, attendance rates, and, for high schools, dropout rates. BCPSS and MSDE have used a multifaceted approach for improving the performance of RE schools on these measures. The state provides additional funding for RE schools, and MSDE deploys technical assistance teams to work with each of them. Some of the changes have been at the central office level at BCPSS, resulting in changes to the entire system not just the RE schools. Other supports have come from the BCPSS area administration offices, particularly in the case of two areas that have a high concentration of RE

schools. (The newly named RE schools are part of the new CEO's District.) The role of MSDE has focused on supporting strategic planning, using data to inform decisionmaking, building leadership capacity, and monitoring. Recently, technical assistance activities have been increased. Finally, needs are addressed at the individual school level, and each RE school is required to have a school improvement team (SIT), which is responsible for developing a school improvement plan (SIP).

Our analyses provide mixed results regarding the implementation of the various supports for RE schools. Most of the system's reform efforts in the early years have been directed at the elementary level. Generally, these seem to be having the desired payoff. However, the picture at the middle and high school levels is unclear. Not surprisingly, when asked to evaluate the reform efforts, principals of RE elementary schools were more positive about the reforms than principals of RE middle and high schools on every aspect queried.

Plans put forth by BCPSS for RE schools place priority on hiring teachers for RE schools and filling the positions with certified teachers. However, at present, RE schools are less likely than non-RE schools to have fully certified teachers. In addition, RE schools tend to have less experienced teachers and principals.

Special Education

Activities related to students with disabilities have resulted from a federal court case, *Vaughn G., et al., v Mayor and City Council, et al.* When BCPSS developed the original Master Plan, the district was operating under the special education Long-Range Compliance Plan outlined by the court and referenced in SB 795. On May 4, 2000, this plan was replaced by disengagement standards that specified 15 outcomes and a requirement for reporting student achievement. This new document continues to address compliance issues, but also contains indicators that are more focused on the quality of services being provided. Activities and findings under the court order are summarized in this report. They

show that BCPSS has made considerable progress in meeting special education requirements and federal criteria. During summer 2001, Inclusion Services was moved to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in order to provide additional support to general education teachers. However, since the special education activities in BCPSS are under considerable scrutiny by the federal court, it was agreed that they would be addressed to only a modest degree in the Westat evaluation. Westat was asked to summarize the court's findings rather than doing its own independent review.

Senate Bill 795 required BCPSS to have a management information system with the capacity to track compliance with the provisions of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This system is known as SETS (Special Education Tracking System). We found that most principals perceived the SETS reports to be useful, and that the reports had improved in quality and accuracy over the last 4 years. (Accuracy of the system is audited annually by MSDE.)

During the late 1990s, many activities associated with the management of special education were driven necessarily by compliance matters associated with the Vaughn G. lawsuit. This resulted in a separation of special education planning activities from those done under The Master Plan and a separate data tracking system for special education.

Parental Involvement

Data collected from a variety of sources indicate a mixed picture of success in this area. It appears that the district has made diligent efforts to encourage and help parents to be involved in their children's education. Schools have expanded programs such as PTA/PTO meetings, workshops on parenting, workshops on how to help students with schoolwork, and health/mental health programs.

While some parents feel that the schools are not doing enough and do not provide a welcoming environment for parents, the large majority of

those in our survey reported that the Baltimore City public schools were actively trying to involve them in their children's education.**

The extent of parental participation was also assessed differently by the different respondent groups. While data from our site visits indicated that lack of parental involvement was a significant concern among teachers and principals, responses from the parent survey indicated a reasonable level of parental involvement in school programs or activities. Surprisingly high numbers indicated that they participated in PTA/PTO meetings, volunteered at their children's schools, or had individual contact with their children's teachers and other school staff.

Overall, nearly three-quarters of the parents who chose to respond to the survey were pleased with their children's schools, and 80 percent were, to varying degrees, satisfied with the efforts made by BCPSS to improve their children's learning.

Safety and Discipline

BCPSS has initiated a number of reforms aimed at creating the kinds of conditions in schools that enable teachers to teach and students to learn. The district has instituted a new code of conduct that has been disseminated to principals, teachers, students, and parents. School records indicate that while arrests, expulsions, and other serious infractions of the code of conduct have declined since 1998, both short- and long-term suspensions have increased. Although principals and teachers indicated that enforcement of the new code of conduct has helped to reduce disruptive behavior and improve school climate, more of them attribute most positive changes to other actions taken at the schools.

The district opened its first Alternative Learning Center in 1999 to provide educational, social, and treatment services to middle school students in the Southeastern region. Since that time,

**It is important to note that the response rate on this survey was a modest 27 percent, and those who chose to respond may not be representative of BCPSS parents.

alternative classrooms have been set up in 14 high schools, 6 middle schools, and 8 elementary schools, and additional programs for disruptive elementary students are in the planning stage. Seven of the alternative programs for students in grades 9–12 were designed to address the district’s very serious dropout problem. These twilight and flex programs offer late day and evening hours and a technology-based career component for high school students who have already dropped out of school and 8th grade students considered at risk of becoming dropouts. While these efforts have helped to alleviate some of the district’s most pressing problems, the need for alternative placements and programs far exceeds the number of available slots. In particular, there is a need for more and better alternatives to suspension and more appropriate placements for students of elementary school age. The district and individual schools have taken other steps to create safer environments that are more conducive to learning. A 3-year plan was developed for reducing drugs and violence in schools and action steps are now being undertaken.

On balance, BCPSS has made considerable progress in safety and discipline in terms of both programs and initiatives implemented and targets met on key indicators of safety.

Human Resources

Since Maryland SB 795, BCPSS has implemented in good faith, and genuinely advanced on, a broad, multi-pronged front to enhance the quality, stability, and effectiveness of its workforce in the schools. Four prongs of this complex effort are addressed in this part of the evaluation.

Recruitment

Many positive steps have been taken in recruitment. Personnel recruiting efforts have been intensified and enhanced, led by the Director of Human Resources for BCPSS. Since 1997, BCPSS has developed and gained substantial funding for additional attractive avenues to

teacher certification through partnerships with local universities and colleges (e.g., Project Site Support). BCPSS now has staff dedicated to recruiting and advertising only, has produced informative teacher candidate materials, and is in the process of developing and bringing online a database intended to rationalize and streamline the process of evaluating the credentials of applicants and existing teachers.

The district has advocated and won stronger incentive, salary, and overall compensation packages for new teachers and principals that likely will attract additional interest and applicants.

Retention

BCPSS has taken numerous steps to stem the high outflow of early-career teachers from the district in recent years. A number of new-teacher mentor programs with committed staffs have been implemented, as well as improved over time, as a result of ongoing third-party evaluations. In addition, through its professional development arm, BCPSS has developed and implemented a New Teachers Summer Institute that strongly facilitates the induction of new teachers in the district. Although too early to see much in the way of sustained improvement in teacher retention from these efforts, there are some indications that they are working in the intended direction. For example, the number of new teachers needed in recent years has declined and shows promise of continuing in that direction.

Despite enhanced recruitment, retention, and mentoring efforts, the turnover in BCPSS’ workforce remains comparatively high, particularly for teachers, at somewhat over 15 percent. Perhaps most challenging is that despite reductions in the annual numbers of newly hired teachers, the proportion of the teaching workforce that holds provisional credentials has ballooned from about 14 percent 5 years ago to over 24 percent currently. This figure is the highest among Maryland counties (only Prince George’s comes close), and well beyond state totals (about 8 percent). Thus, recruiting

and retaining quality teachers in the BCPSS workforce remains a significant challenge.

Professional Development

BCPSS has recognized the need to strengthen both the quantity (variety) and quality of the professional development opportunities it provides teachers and school administrators. BCPSS has made progress in this direction through the reorganization of its professional development operation and expansion of its programs and offerings. Districtwide participation in professional development is very high, and participants assign the offerings moderately high marks for organization, clarity, and relevance. Professional development offerings now cover a wide range of topics, including issues in special education, and BCPSS teachers have availed themselves of the range of topics—much of which seems to focus on classroom practice.

Challenges remain in BCPSS professional development. For example, close to half of the teachers surveyed for this evaluation reported that they participate only because it is a requirement of employment in the district—not a ringing endorsement by consumers of the perceived usefulness of what’s being offered. Many suggest that the district’s offerings could be made more relevant to their working situations, and that this could be achieved through consultation with teachers and/or principals.

Performance-Based Evaluation System

In the area of personnel evaluation for improvement and quality assurance, BCPSS has designed and implemented performance-based evaluation systems anchored to student learning for both its teachers and principals that is now in use for the majority of the schools’ workforce. The training of qualified school personnel to use the new system is essentially complete, additional procedures are being developed for specialist groups in the schools, and the teacher evaluation system’s main instrument has undergone two state-led audits and resulting improvements.

Although the new Performance-Based Evaluation System for teachers is now in place, with eligible evaluators trained, the system exists and operates absent widespread and needed support or ownership from either teachers or principals, and without much evidence at this time that it contributes to the improvement of the teaching or administrative workforces. In fact, the views of many teachers and administrators regarding the evaluation system’s centerpiece portfolio seems to be that it is simply one more hurdle to jump over, and largely disconnected from what they actually do in their classrooms.

Management and Organization

The evaluation examined:

- Systemwide organization and management
- Facilities and maintenance
- Financial management
- Procurement
- Information technology
- Division of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability
- The Master Plan
- The New Board of School Commissioners

Systemwide Organization and Management

BCPSS must effectively manage people and property to fulfill its primary objective—educating students—efficiently. Over the last years, the district has hired a team of highly qualified individuals to lead various administrative groups and reorganized the central and area offices to better support schools’ and students’ needs. Finally, the district conducted a facilities needs assessment and identified 12 schools for closure.

While these steps are encouraging, interviews with staff throughout the district and analysis of enrollment data indicate that further progress is urgently needed. There is an imbalance in the number of highly paid administrators serving the district and the number of other staff—particularly at the school level—available to help perform routine and day-to-day activities. Finally, several challenges exist in determining facilities needs, balancing physical capacity, humane considerations, and programmatic needs.

Facilities Planning, Maintenance, and Operations

Objective 4 of The Master Plan defines facility maintenance and use as a focus area. Within this focus area, the plan specifies two strategies: establish an effective system for school construction, maintenance, and repair; and determine the most efficient use of available school buildings. Once again, SB 795 served as the impetus for these measures.

Since the adoption of The Master Plan, BCPSS has conducted an inventory of the facilities it operates and an evaluation of their condition. This investigation resulted in recommendations for specific school closures, and has prompted additional recommendations for capital improvement projects and other types of improvements.

The study findings indicate varying levels of satisfaction with the services among school administrators. While there was widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of the maintenance and repair services available to the schools, there was widespread satisfaction with grounds keeping and waste management services. Improvements have also been made in Food Services and Mail Distribution.

There remains a substantial need for finding ways to address deferred maintenance. Many school buildings have serious problems that interfere with the instructional mission.

Financial Management

SB 795 directed BCPSS to implement an effective financial management and budgeting system, and to use that system as a management tool rather than simply as a management process. One significant element of the new system is its independence from the City of Baltimore system.

While the implementation of the new system has taken longer than first expected, the process has been largely successful. Whereas in 1997, outside auditors declined to evaluate BCPSS accounts, in 2000 PriceWaterhouseCoopers wrote that "...the new financial system implementation was a reasonably smooth transition from the old processing environment to the new environment." Improved systems have been put in place that provide reports that are both more timely and more accurate. Additional steps are planned that will further improve the district's financial management and budgeting (e.g., the Enterprise Resource Planning system).

Findings from the surveys and interviews conducted by the Westat team indicate progress in several areas. Budget information provided to the schools by the central office is now viewed as more user-friendly; however, timeliness is still a problem. The district's Financial Office help desk also was viewed as a positive step toward improving relations with the school staff. Finally, there were positive reactions to the new grants accounting manager and her efforts to improve communication between the office and the schools.

Procurement

Since the passage of SB 795, responsibility for procurement has shifted from the City of Baltimore to the district and individual schools. The current policies specify threshold amounts that determine the level of authorization needed for the procurement: any purchase under \$5,000 can be authorized at the school level, purchases between \$5,000 and \$15,000 must be authorized by the Procurement Department, and those greater than \$15,000 must be authorized by the Board and put out for bid.

Interview and survey findings point to widespread appreciation of the new process. While school personnel recognize that the change has placed additional burden on the schools, they believe that the benefits are more significant. Vendors that serve the district also noted positive effects of the changed policies.

Information Technology

The Information Technology (IT) Department and IT functions are improving. Substantive changes have been made in the management, planning, staffing, and use of technology in the IT functions at BCPSS. These changes have facilitated system management and led to better utilization of resources. Based on the analyses performed, it can be concluded that:

- The users of IT feel that the delivery of IT services is improving.
- The IT Department at BCPSS has established good management practices.
- The new management team in IT has developed a thoughtful plan for correcting the current shortcomings in the department.

Recognizing these accomplishments, significant challenges that must be addressed still remain. While there is considerably more satisfaction with services and information provided to schools, access to email for staff other than principals and other administrators is limited. Professional development for teachers, especially with regard to instruction, warrants continuing attention and expansion.

Supports Provided by READ***

The evaluation finds that a strong accountability system has not been established. READ, the unit charged by SB 795 with monitoring progress and increasing understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the reform effort, has provided minimal data of educational or policy relevance since the passage of SB 795 until recently. In part, this failure is linked to the system's failure to establish consistent indicators of progress. However, beyond this failure of management, the unit itself has failed to provide timely, quality data that can be used for program improvement.

Recently, a new officer has been appointed to permanently direct this division, and there are indications that positive changes are underway. Attention is needed to continue to establish a system wherein progress can be monitored against established targets, and data to inform program improvement are systematically collected and disseminated.

Role of The Master Plan

The Master Plan is in many ways the centerpiece of the planning and management structure. The plan, which has evolved over time, is based on a set of goals and objectives clearly in line with the requirements of SB 795. Originally one of several plans governing school operations, The Master Plan has evolved into a single framework for integrating and guiding the school system's functions and activities. While previous years' iterations of the plan have not adequately explicated standards for success and indicators of progress, and accountability provisions have been incomplete, the 2002 Master Plan appears to be correcting this shortcoming and establishing a framework for monitoring and accountability. Additional work needs to be done to fully synchronize this plan with budget development, a step that has not yet been completed.

***The name of this office has recently been changed to Division of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability.

Within the school community, there is a broad-based awareness of the plan, although not all staff would be considered truly knowledgeable about its contents. School administrators are well aware of the stipulations of the plan and have used them as a guide for developing school improvement plans. Teachers and staff other than leadership team members are less knowledgeable about the details of The Master Plan, but do know of its existence and impact on plans for their school operations.

The vast majority feel the plan is having a beneficial impact on their own schools and BCPSS overall. Principals' support is especially strong, with 99 percent being aware of and agreeing with the plan and 92 percent feeling that it is having a beneficial impact. Not surprisingly, parents are less knowledgeable about the plan, with less than half being aware of its contents.

New Board of School Commissioners

We find that the unique governance structure established by the legislature under SB 795 has been effective and should be continued. Our examination of the accomplishments of the school system and the role played by the New Board of School Commissioners indicates that MSDE and the New Board have been fully responsive to the requirements of SB 795 and relentless in their support for reform. The requirements for Board memberships established through SB 795 have served reform well, providing a cadre of professionals with outstanding experience to guide reform. Indeed, the Board has played a unique role in the redirection of the BCPSS system and has, despite some missteps, provided the kind of leadership and "tough love" needed to begin a turnaround of a badly failing system. However, the task of reengineering the school system and establishing it as a system that effectively serves the children of Baltimore is far from complete.

Major Recommendations

This evaluation of BCPSS has identified many areas of progress, and many remaining challenges. Efforts have been made to change both the system and individual schools. Over the years, some strategies have failed and some have succeeded. This should be expected given the extensive nature of the changes that were needed within BCPSS. Perhaps it is more important that the efforts continue, regardless of the outcome of any one strategy.

Our evaluation leads to two overarching recommendations for continued progress:

- Involve stakeholders outside the central office more fully in decision making, and
- Improve and enhance the information available for guiding reform and assessing its results.

Involve Stakeholders

As BCPSS continues its efforts, perhaps our most important suggestion is that the district conduct a comprehensive review of the *processes* undertaken to identify and implement potential remedies. Our evaluation found widespread desire among state, district, and school staff and among family and community members to work side by side in these efforts. Improved coordination, articulation, and communication between these diverse groups about the overall goals of the reforms are needed to ensure that the district benefits from their expertise and to foster commitment to the changes. The arrangement between BCPSS and MSDE is one example of this coordination that we believe has benefited the district's staff and students, and we recommend that this relationship continue.

Enhance Monitoring and Evaluation

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of all the district's efforts at reform are imperative given the limited resources and great need for improvement. In many areas, BCPSS has lacked the information needed to make informed policy decisions and wisely target resources. Managers have been guided by reports of activities carried out rather than results obtained. To provide better information, we suggest that READ implement a rigorous system of program monitoring and evaluation, focused on outcomes and the linkages between interventions and outcomes that will support managers more adequately. Reports on the summer school program, on the MFT scores, and on the SAT test scores produced in summer of 2001 suggest that the timeliness and quality of reports are improving. Initial plans developed by READ for new evaluations are a welcome step in expanding BCPSS' capacity in this area.

We conclude this Executive Summary with specific recommendations for the continued progress of BCPSS.

1. Continue the City-State Partnership

As stated earlier, the evaluation indicates that the City-State Partnership has been a productive one and that both BCPSS and MSDE have worked hard to combine and synergize their resources to support the reform effort. There are many things about the current partnership that seem valuable: the background and experience requirements for Board membership; the roles of the city, MSDE, and the governor's office in the selection and appointment process; and the collaborative relationship that has characterized the interactions between BCPSS and MSDE.

The extra financial supports provided by Annapolis have also been extremely important and, we believe, have been invested appropriately on areas of identified need. Based on what we found, we strongly recommend that the current partnership and its supports be continued.

- Continue the New Board of School Commissioners with the same basic requirements for composition and length of service.
- Continue the collaborative relationship between BCPSS and MSDE.
- Continue providing additional financial aid to BCPSS to help the system expand and accelerate its improvement in serving the students of Baltimore City.

2. Monitor Impact of Restructuring

BCPSS has undergone much restructuring since first implementing The Master Plan. This has included creation of new area offices, reassignment of schools to these area offices, school closures, and alterations to the services provided by the central office and by the schools. Highly qualified staff have been hired to fill the most senior positions. Yet, the district does not have information on the impact that the restructuring has had on staffing levels, staffing assignments, or costs associated with salaries paid to staff who perform the various functions within the district.

In addition, administrative structures that were established in the wake of SB 795 and the Vaughn G. court case might no longer be appropriate. Duplicate structures may cause unnecessary expenditures and may result in differential quality of services.

- Examine the capabilities of staff in middle management positions. Make sure these individuals have the experience and expertise to provide guidance and leadership to the reform.
- Conduct a review of the staffing configuration throughout the district, including levels of administrative and support staff in both the central office and schools. Seek to identify barriers and incentives to the efficient and cost-effective implementation of the district's primary mission (i.e., education) and identify remedies if the configuration is found to be inappropriate or inefficient.

- As BCPSS moves toward disengagement from the court-ordered Long-Range Compliance Plan over the next few years, examine how services for all students can be integrated more closely at all levels, including the management level. In addition, continue the development of compatibility between SETS and SASI.
- Examine whether BCPSS has sufficient and appropriate staff in place to allow members of the New Board of Commissioners to step back from their current level of direct management. This includes developing a plan for assuring that highly qualified and experienced personnel will continue to fill top management roles.

3. Seek More Creative and Meaningful Ways to Reach Out to Teachers

Analysis of teachers' responses to the survey items, comments written in by teachers, and focus groups with teachers indicate that teachers do not feel they own the reform effort in the same way as staff at the central office and do not feel that their needs are being met. As the City-State Partnership moves forward into its next phase of operation, it is important both to listen to the concerns of teachers and to engage them more fully in the design and implementation of the change process.

- Look more closely at the content and design of professional development activities. Many teachers do not feel that current offerings fully meet their needs. Involve schools in a needs assessment and planning process for school-based professional development.
- As reviews are conducted and refinements are made in the curricula, actively seek input from teachers regarding their perceptions of the textbooks, milestone assessments, and other support materials. Actively solicit their assessment of whether these tools are working and how they could work better.
- Continue to involve teachers as teacher mentors. Use teachers to support both new

teachers and those who may be having problems.

4. Improve Facilities Management

BCPSS must grapple with several challenges related to facilities management, the solutions to which often appear to conflict with one another. BCPSS operates more facilities than are currently necessary or will be necessary in the foreseeable future. At the same time, many existing facilities are in need of repair and retrofitting if they are expected to meet the changing needs of school staff and students. There also may be a legitimate need for new construction as the student population shifts between different regions of the district. Finally, there are other community and neighborhood concerns that will influence the level of local support for any actions taken in response to these needs. The concerns of the public need to be heard and addressed.

- Continue to undertake activities to improve facilities management, considering fiscal and human needs. Enhance BCPSS' capacity for planning by hiring permanent staff with advanced analytic knowledge and skills in planning, including demography and geographic mobility.
- Consider using public-private partnerships to reduce the future management burden placed on BCPSS and using innovative approaches to reduce the costs associated with existing facilities (e.g., closing selected facilities at a school site or sharing space and responsibilities with community groups). In addition, involve families and local community leaders in the entire planning process—from conception of the plans through implementation.
- Work to improve the quality of repair and maintenance services. Consider the development of a means to track the satisfactory completion of maintenance and repair requests, possibly developing an electronic system that district and school staff can use to request work, monitor progress on the task, and evaluate the outcome (i.e.,

“customer” satisfaction) of the completed work.

5. Increase Access to High Quality IT

BCPSS has allocated significant resources to upgrade information technology throughout the district. This effort has resulted in improved communication capabilities and potentially enhanced instructional programs. However, BCPSS lacks information on the best ways to target these efforts. Specifically, information is needed on what school staff identify as their most pressing IT needs, such as computer applications, hardware, and training.

- Work in greater partnership with school staff to integrate IT plans districtwide. As part of this effort, consider completing the vision document, initiating user groups and chat rooms, and employing a full-time IT coordinator to assist with writing grants related to school IT.
- Implement current IT plans and discuss with school staff potential enhancements that will aid instructional activities or facilitate school operations. Continue expanding and enhancing:
 - a. Access to email for teaching staff, wiring of schools, and provision of adequate computer hardware;
 - b. Software such as classroom instruction or management tools; and
 - c. Professional development services for teachers at all schools to better prepare them to integrate technology in support of learning.

6. Upgrade Communications Between the Administrative Levels and the Schools

Schools and the central office must rely upon each other for a vast amount of information to effectively and efficiently achieve the mission of BCPSS. The quality and timeliness of this information is critical to the success of their efforts from the administrative offices to the

schools themselves. In addition, collaboration and accommodation to each other’s needs is necessary to foster a collegial environment and further increase the success of their mission. Anecdotal and survey findings reflect that information is not always shared effectively or efficiently. Unfortunately, BCPSS does not have information on the specific points in the process where problems occur and, therefore, is unlikely to identify solutions to the problems.

- Continue to improve the process by which financial data are provided by BCPSS so that it becomes faster and more convenient for school staff and the general public.
- Investigate ways to improve the timeliness of the data delivery.

7. Continue Emphasis on Building Staff Capacity

Efforts to recruit, support, and evaluate school staff are underway. Yet during this evaluation, many questions were raised about staffing issues: the adequacy of support staff working in the schools; the incentives offered to new staff; the training and credentials of newly hired teachers; the leadership capacity of new principals; and methods used to evaluate staff. No forum exists in which school staff can participate in the development and review of plans to address these issues.

- Increase collaboration between the central office and school-level staff to identify and recruit new staff and to retain all staff. Include discussions about differential teacher compensation, professional development opportunities, and the Performance-Based Evaluation System.
- Continue to provide leadership training for principals, especially those new to BCPSS and the role.
- Examine methods that over time might reduce the number of provisionally certified teachers. Efforts to increase the proportion of certified and tenured teachers serving middle

schools and high schools are especially needed.

- Conduct an evaluation of the use of teacher portfolios. Focus the evaluation on the desired results of the teacher's work (e.g., student learning) rather than on a particular method or instrument (e.g., portfolios). Involve teachers in this review process.

8. Determine the Effects of Whole-School Reform Models

Various reform models have been implemented in schools throughout the district. Anecdotal evidence suggests that elements of each of the models can help improve student achievement. Findings from this evaluation indicate that improved achievement in some areas (e.g., language arts) is associated with selected models. However, BCPSS does not have data that could help identify the best model for its students or identify which elements of the various models have the greatest positive effects on students.

- Evaluate the effects of the multiple school reform models currently implemented in the district (e.g., Achievement First, Direct Instruction) and consider whether additional models should be adopted. Include the examination of three core issues.
 - a. What effect does each model have on student achievement? This question is especially important in light of high student mobility and high teacher turnover rates.
 - b. To what extent is each model aligned with BCPSS and Maryland standards, and with the current research regarding learning and cognition?
 - c. To what extent is each model truly a "whole-school" reform rather than a reading program? Does the model address all content areas? Does it address pedagogy, relationships among staff, and integration across content areas?

- Expand reform efforts at middle and high schools. Specifically:

- a. Increase access to instructional materials and offer additional staff development on reform goals and methods.
- b. Create smaller learning environments (e.g., themed schools) at these levels.
- c. Initiate and more fully implement special programs such as intervention and accelerated programs, as well as alternative programs for disruptive students or other students in need.

9. Reassess and, as Necessary, Modify Curricula

BCPSS has reviewed curricula for reading/language arts, science, mathematics, and other content areas. From this process, the district has selected specific curricula for general use throughout BCPSS. Findings from this evaluation indicated widespread acceptance of the curricula and general appreciation of the related staff development that has been provided. However, we also found dissatisfaction with some elements of the curricula and need for additional support if the curricula are to meet all students' need.

- Conduct an audit and comprehensive review of the curricula that have been selected. Address the alignment of the curricula with state outcomes, student assessments, and access to textbooks and other instructional materials.
- Determine ways in which the citywide curricula can be adopted to support full inclusion of special education students, while at the same time providing the differentiation that may be needed to help them achieve their potential. Provide additional training for teachers in using the curricula with special education students.

10. Evaluate the Policies and Programs Designed to Provide Extra Supports for Young Learners and Learners at Risk

The district has implemented several new activities and programs designed to help prepare children to enter school, help prepare them to advance to the next grade level, and assist those students who are at risk of academic failure. These programs have won widespread approval of families and school staff. However, the programs come at a significant financial cost, and they absorb the attention of many staff. There are no data that provide a comprehensive assessment of the costs and benefits of these programs or services.

- Develop a class-size reduction plan that addresses *all* elementary grade levels, including prekindergarten and kindergarten, and monitor the implementation of the plan.
- Evaluate the specific ready-to-learn initiatives that are in place in the district and provide additional funds to those that are most successful at improving student readiness.
- Expand the efforts to support schools at middle and high schools with a history of low academic performance, and evaluate their effects at the earliest possible time.
- Evaluate the effects of the interventions associated with the new promotion and retention policy on student achievement. Also examine the barriers and incentives to student participation in the interventions, including factors that affect staff, parent, and student involvement.

11. Continue to Use and Develop The Master Plan as a Comprehensive Blueprint for System Functioning

BCPSS struggles to address the challenges it faces given limited financial resources. Our evaluation indicated that district and school staff, family members, and local community members all have ideas about how best to allocate resources—thereby creating competition among various initiatives that might be implemented.

Strategic planning and identification of priority initiatives would help guide budget decisions; however, the budgeting process often has been completed *before* the strategic planning process.

- Improve the level of coordination and alignment of the budgeting process and The Master Plan. This includes both continuing to align programs and resources and coordinating their schedules for development and public presentation.

12. Continue Efforts to Involve Parents and Support the Work of the Parent and Community Advisory Committee

It is widely recognized that BCPSS cannot succeed in its primary mission without the support and involvement of parents. However, parental involvement has been a challenge for BCPSS during the past few years. This evaluation identified many challenges faced by families of BCPSS students that discourage the necessary support and involvement. The district has implemented some programs to foster involvement, and schools throughout the district have attempted additional efforts that were tailored to their individual school communities. Given the recognition of the role played by the parents and families, BCPSS needs more information about the barriers and more support to overcome this challenge.

- We recommend that schools improve and increase their outreach activities to intensify parent involvement in the schools. A key strategy is to increase the number and capacity of parent liaisons in the schools. Teachers, parents, and liaison staff should work together to build a parent involvement strategy tailored to each school's needs. Additional attention should also be given to the role and work of the Office of Parental Involvement. In addition, schools need to make parents members of teams working diligently to improve the achievement of students.